

The Steady, Sufficient, and Sure Word of God Part 2

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2 Peter 1:16-21

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

In Paul's second epistle to Timothy the aged apostle writes, "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:10-12).

Persecution is not reserved only for Christians in North Korea, or those in Islamic Iran, or the underground Church in China. The Apostle Paul says that for every Christian, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution." Isn't that every Christian? Can there be such a thing as a Christian who does not want to live godly in Christ Jesus?

With the Supreme Court ruling legalizing homosexual marriage came the restriction of the first amendment's right to the free exercise of religion and the liberty of free speech. This is what will happen as a result. This means, as I said last week, a new form of persecution beyond ridicule and mockery. We will see loss of reputations, possessions, and freedoms as Christians in America.

But please, "do not let your hearts be troubled," as Jesus said. We must not be overcome by the prospect of a more severe form of persecution. We should not be anxious or alarmed by this. Rather, we are to remember that our Lord Jesus has overcome all enemies and we are to be faithful in carrying out His order to make disciples who make disciples. That's our business. Do not let what happened a week ago Friday distract us. Do not let is happening in culture be a distraction from the task that we've been given to go and make disciples. Disciple-making is not over for we Christians in America. The church thrived in the first century when it began in a hostile environment, and those men turned the world upside down. Regardless of the environment in

which we find ourselves in the west, we can still fulfill God's task. Since our culture has shifted from a Judeo-Christian ethic to a post-Christian and post-modern ethic we must all the more be prepared, as the Apostle Peter commanded, to give a defense of the Christian faith.

If we are salt and light to our generation, then we must be able to rationally discuss our faith in a way that displays faith to be reasonable and not superstitious, not some blind leap of faith that is not evidential. If you do not know why you believe what you believe you are going to be embarrassed at best and at worst found hypocritical by friends, culture, neighbors, and people at school. We need to know why we believe what we believe. It's not sufficient just because dad said so or even the pastor. No, you need to know why you believe what you believe. It's not enough to know your doctrine, you need to understand the reasoning behind it and the why behind the Truth. This is what Peter told us in our text.

Last week in our text we spoke of the Apostle Peter's foundational Christian apologetic. Again, *apologetic* here doesn't mean apology or saying "I'm sorry." It means to give a defense, an answer, an explanation for why you believe what you believe. There are two major pillars of Peter's defense. Last week we only had time to talk about one of the two. We demonstrated that Peter's defense of the Christian faith rested upon the eyewitness accounts of Jesus and His ministry. The events of Jesus' life are historically recorded and they are either going to survive upon the reliability of the testimonies of the eyewitnesses or they will not. That's what you do with history. You put it to the test. Is it reliable? Is the record sound? Do the eyewitness testimonies come together in a harmonious way or do they disagree? The Christian faith is a historical faith, not only in the sense that it has a history, but that it is based upon historical facts. Those facts either happened or they did not.

Lee Strobel was an atheist who had a degree in journalism and a Masters in law from Yale University Law School. He went on to be the legal editor of *The Chicago Tribune* and received many awards. In early 1980, he, being an atheist, decided he would do a thorough investigation on the authenticity of the Christian faith. One of the reasons he did this was because his wife had just recently been converted and he wanted to show her how ludicrous, how ridiculous it was to turn from her agnosticism to full blown Christian faith. He said he was determined to deliver her from the cultish church in which she had become a part of. It was just a normal evangelical church but in his mind it was cult-like because it had diluted the mind of his wife. So he ensued into a 21-month investigation of the truths of the Christian faith.

In light of the scientific evidence that pointed toward a Creator and the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, Strobel came to the conclusion that it would have required more faith for him to maintain his atheism than to become a Christian and he became a devout Christian. He surrendered his life to Christ after a whole life of rejecting any kind of faith. He grew up believing there was no God and he became more and more convinced as he grew. I ask you, how could he so suddenly change? It's one fact: the historicity and reliability of the eyewitness of the resurrection.

Now why would an atheistic, skeptical, legal journalist drop his atheism and embrace the Christ he had vehemently denied? Once again, because of the historicity and reliability of the eyewitness of the resurrection were irrefutable. I have no problem being challenged by some skeptic or unbeliever. I have no problem when a historian wants to challenge the historicity of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the facts are on my side. The eyewitness accounts are historically accurate, and therefore, Christ and Christianity are both factual and reasonable.

This is Peter's very point to the churches he was writing, "I saw Jesus and I have only told you what I saw, nothing more or less."

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

The eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ, proving by His life and miracles that He was who He said He was, was the first pillar of Peter's argument, which we discussed last week. Today, I want to examine Peter's second pillar upon which his faith rested, it is the written Word of God. He says in verse 19,

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19)

The Word of God is the second pillar of Christian apologetic.

I. Christianity is Based Upon the Record of Scripture

The Christianity is based on the testimony of God written for us in what we call our Bibles. This is what Peter says in verse 19, "We have this prophetic word confirmed."

A. What is the Prophetic Word?

Is he talking about one particular prophecy of the Old Testament or a few prophecies? No, he's talking about the entire Old Testament. Your entire Old Testament Scriptures is this "prophetic word confirmed." Peter is saying the whole Bible—which, at that time was only the Old Testament—is God's Word and therefore God has testified to these things and he believes it.

B. What Does Peter Mean By Confirmed?

"we have the prophetic word confirmed"

It depends upon which translation you have. Here there are many differences and variances in translations.

For example,

NIV—“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain”

ESV—“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed”

HCSB—“So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed”

KJV—“We have also a more sure word of prophecy”

NASB—“So we have the prophetic word made more sure”

The phrase in the NKJV, “we have the prophetic word confirmed,” or “we have a more sure word of prophecy,” from the KJV, could be understood in either one of two ways: (1) “The Old Testament is confirmed by what we saw as eyewitnesses” or, (2) “We have a better word in the Old Testament than what we saw as eyewitnesses.” In other words, “The Bible is more convincing than even Jesus’ transfiguration and the voice of God heard at the transfiguration and our eyewitness account of it.”

I believe this is what Peter is saying: you can never gauge anything more reliable than the Bible, even the eyewitness accounts of the first apostles.

I think the NKJV is closer to what he’s trying to say, for several reasons. First, there’s the Greek Grammar. I’m not going to get into that because there are differences of opinions and I don’t want to wade through that meticulous and tedious material.

There’s a theological reason why I think the NKJV is a little more accurate in the way it translates this phrase. It’s hard to imagine that Peter would be saying that there was some doubt about the Old Testament being the word of God without what he saw and his testimony of it. That is very suspect. The Word of God is the Word of God. Period. Even if you can’t prove the Word of God, even if we couldn’t prove this Bible, it’s still the Word of God whether we can test it or not. God’s Word is God’s Word. I don’t think Peter is saying that.

It’s equally hard to imagine that Peter was saying that the Old Testament Scripture is more reliable and sure than his testimony of what he saw.

Three reasons why:

How did the Old Testament prophets receive their messages? Was it not by visions, dreams, etc.? Didn’t they see things and then were just reporters of what they saw? They were also, like the apostles, simply eyewitnesses sharing what they saw.

The final and fullest revelation of God is Jesus Christ. If you really want to know what God is like, even the Old Testament can’t get as close as Jesus can. He’s the best revelation of God because He’s exactly the same. Jesus said, “If you saw Me, you saw the Father.”

Thirdly, the apostle’s writings also are inspired Scripture.

I think the Apostle Peter is saying that you have two pillars upon which your faith should rest—The eyewitness accounts of the Apostles and the Old Testament, which in the final analysis is the entire Bible. The eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus are the four Gospels and the explanation of the life of Christ is the Epistles. Peter is saying both the Old and New Testaments is a sufficient foundation for the answer you give the inquiring public for why you are a Christian. The apostles saw and they recorded it. The Old Testament is reliable because it is the Word of God, but I think what Peter is saying is that he's simply confirming what the prophets foretold. He's not substantiating the validity of the Bible, he's simply saying it's proven true by what the apostles saw. The prophetic events of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. Therefore he is saying your Bible is reliable.

II. The Reliability of the Bible

How do you know the Book you are holding is reliable? How can you stake your reputation with unbelievers who ask you why you're a Christian? How can you stake, more importantly, your eternity on it? If you are a Christian, you're saying, "I am basing my eternal destiny on one fact—this Book is true." You say, "No, I'm basing it upon the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and He is the Savior and He died for my sins." But how did you know that? Apart from this written revelation you would have no way of knowing that. This is the testimony of these things, God's testimony, therefore I say that your eternal wellbeing is based upon the reliability or unreliability of this Book. It's important that we know what we have here. Not only is it important for your eternal destiny, but for those of you who are going through trials and tribulations it's extremely important right now and very relevant for you that you know why.

The question "Why?" is always hounding us. Why is this happening? Why am I going through this? Why, Lord? The answer is based upon no other speculation or intellectual reasoning alone, it's based upon the sure Word of God. "God has appointed this to you to suffer as well as to believe" (Philippians 1:21). The Bible does not hide the sufferings of a Christian, it exposes them and tells us that we are going to go through deep waters and there will be hours in which there will be difficult tribulations of our heart. How can you withstand? How will you survive during those hours? By the Word of God and its reliability.

Let me give you a few reasons why I believe the Bible is absolutely reliable.

A. The Unity of the Bible.

The unity of the Bible remarkably proves to me the validity of the Bible. There is a beautiful harmony in all of Scriptures. There is no contradiction. It tells the same thing from all different perspectives. Peter says,

*"knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
(2 Peter 1:20, 21)*

What does he mean, “Scripture is not of any private interpretation”? There’s been a great deal of controversy on that through the ages. The Catholic Church interprets it saying, “You just can’t interpret the Bible by yourself. It’s of no private interpretation, the church has to interpret that for you, so you need to believe what the church tells you the Bible says, not your own interpretation.” That’s not what Peter is saying. Verse 21 tells you what he’s saying. He is simply saying that no Scripture came about by a prophet’s own imagination. It’s not born from human impulse. Nobody ever created what he wrote. In fact, he says in the first epistle that the prophets inquired of God what they were saying. They didn’t even understand everything they wrote; much of it was a mystery to them. It’s not of any private interpretation, just one man inventing some idea and doctrine or religion, no. These men were moved, carried along, by the Holy Spirit. God came upon these men. Forty-some-odd men were moved upon, carried along, by God so that what they wrote became the essential message of God.

Isn’t that remarkable? Did you know there were more than 40 authors? But the Bible shows us there’s really only one Supreme Author behind it all. There’s only one Great Intellect behind it all. How can we be sure of this? Because of the unity of the Bible. I’ve already established there were more than 40 different authors but they didn’t all live at the same time. Your Bible was compiled over 1800 years, from Job—the first Old Testament book written—all the way to Revelation. That was a timespan of 1800 years.

These 40 men were so different in their backgrounds and occupations. Some were intellectuals and some were not. For example, the Apostle Paul was one of the greatest intellects of his time but Peter was simply an unlearned tradesman. Some were priests, some were shepherds, some were kings, some were paupers. They came from such varied backgrounds and not only that but also three different languages were used, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, written on three different continents, Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa. What’s also amazing is that some of these men didn’t even know there was a Bible when they wrote their words. Moses had no idea the book of Job had been written. Yet, there is remarkable harmony and unity.

You see, the truth is your one Bible is really a collection of 66 books and yet in these 66 books, dealing with a wide range of subjects, even controversial subjects, there is no disagreement. There’s perfect unity among these men who God inspired so that they were not robotic or mechanical, just repeating what they heard word for word, although sometimes that happened, their personality came through. Yet, in spite the human agency involved, in the end it was still One Supreme Author. There is no other explanation for this perfect unity.

Suppose you get 40 scholars on one subject, let’s say 40 sociologists or 40 historians and put them in one room. These men all lived in the same time, are all from the same city, and you give them one controversial subject, not many, just one, what’s the likelihood that all 40 scholars are going to say the same thing on that controversial subject? Quite unlikely, that’s why it’s controversial! Yet, the Bible doesn’t just deal with one controversy it deals with a whole host of them and there is not one contradiction. The Bible is God’s Word. God inspired men and they were carried by Him to write the Scriptures. You have the Word of God in your hands.

B. The Moral Content of the Bible.

Another reason to believe the Bible is the Word of God is the moral content of the Bible. There is no other book or religion that espouses salvation by grace. All the major religions of the world, and I've studied most of them, teach a doctrine of salvation by works. In the end, man must achieve some spiritual status. He must climb some spiritual ladder and achieve some supernatural experience, or he must achieve some idea of goodness and morality that a system teaches. There is no other religion that teaches that man is hopelessly lost apart from the grace of a sovereign God.

“For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works...”
(Ephesians 2:8-9a)

If you and I were going to create a religion that we wanted people to follow, it seems to me that you would write something that would be a little bit more achievable. You'd write something to which men could apply themselves and those who really wanted to achieve it would apply themselves all the more and could attain their own spirituality, their own moral destinies. But not the Scriptures. It tears earning eternal salvation out of the hand of man and says there's no hope for any of us. There is no certainty of heaven after death for anyone apart from God's grace. You can do nothing to earn that grace. It's a sovereign God and a sovereign grace. Who would have written something like that and said God predestined before the world those whom He would save? That's remarkable, especially considering you want people to believe your book. There is no other religion that teaches this.

The moral code is impossible to achieve apart from grace. Once again, if I was going to try and get a host of people to follow me in my new religion I would give them something to do so they could feel they have earned something so then they would try harder and get more excited and put in more effort to climb the spiritual ladder, but not the Scriptures. The Bible gives you an incomprehensible task. You're supposed to be like Jesus. Then it turns around and tells you that you can't do it and you need Jesus do that. How fathomable, how reasonable is it that if the Bible had a human author or several human authors this is what they would devise? Would a set of humans come up with an impossibility like this?

Then when you look at the moral content of the Bible you see the exposure of human sin. There is no other religious book that takes its major heroes and lifts them up saying, “Model your life after these men,” and then tells you the good, the bad, and the ugly about them. Moses disobeys God and strikes a rock when he was supposed to speak to it. Peter denies Jesus. Abraham lies out of fear and not faith. David commits murder and adultery. God's Word exposes the mistakes, the sins, and the flaws of its champions.

Then it depicts God as incomprehensible. This to me is a most remarkable fact about the Scriptures being the Word of God. When you read about God you come to the conclusion that you don't understand who He is. Now, human authorship would have taken a different route. A hu-

man author would have made God like every other religion has made God—something after the order of man. Every religion in the world that has deities, from the animism of the Amazon to the Buddhists in India, gods and deities are much along the order of men so that men can try to be like them. The Greek mythology of the ancient world was a similar product. Friends, people don't create the kind of doctrine or teaching that the Bible presents, a God that you can't totally comprehend? I don't think so.

For example, He's one but He's three persons. Please tell me if you were going to write a Bible would you explain God in that way? If you were going to explain Jesus could you explain Him any clearer than, "He's fully God and fully man"? That's not very clear to me. How can the two be truly in one Person? But the Bible states it because it's truth whether we believe it or understand it or not.

Several years ago a man by the name of B.C. Goodpasture wrote this,

"The nature and contents of the Bible are such that the rank and file of its readers in all generations have recognized God as its author. Man would not have written such a book, if he could; and could not, if he would. It moves on a superhuman plane in design, in nature, and in teaching. It caters not to worldly desire and ambition. It condemns much which men in the flesh highly prize, and commends much which they despise. Its thoughts are not the thoughts of men."

I say with all certainty that this Book has to be the Word of God because of its moral content. A man would not write such a book.

C. No Greater Explanation of the History and Future of Mankind.

There is no greater explanation of the problem of evil than what you find in the Bible. The skeptic, the atheist is going to come to you and say, "Now if you have a good and loving God, why does He allow evil?" It's a hard question and the Bible doesn't really give us a full detailed answer. But do you know that the atheist has the same problem. Ask him, "Where do you think evil came from?" And he can't tell you. "Well, perhaps there is some random chance that there is some genetic disorder with us," he tries to suggest, "and man's problem is the result of that."

Well, if that's the case, wouldn't you think that in the chance of randomness in all of these millennia that there could have been one person, just one human being, that was without such a genetic default and could have lived a good, moral, perfect life? The Bible tells us exactly what human history tells us. There's not a one of us that's good. We've all gone astray. The Bible says we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Why? Because sin is not just a physical problem it's a spiritual problem.

I don't deny that sin has so corrupted us that there is some residue of corruption even within these physical bodies but, my dear friend, it also goes to a deeper level, all the way to the heart,

the spirit. You were born in sin and in sin did your mother conceive you. This is the explanation of Scripture. Can you give me a better one? God created man perfectly and He put him in a perfect paradise. He gave him only one restriction: do not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What did man do? He was tempted by the archenemy of God, an angelic creature of God who himself had rebelled, and he deceived Eve and she ate and gave to her husband and from that moment on we have the entire historical record of man. Even secular historians have to substantiate it—mankind has run a foul. Mankind has run into one problem after another and there seems to be no solution. It doesn't matter how intellectual or how technologically advanced we become; we can put man on the moon and maybe one day even on Mars but I tell you that wherever man goes sin goes. Man is corrupt. Man is his own problem. This is what the Scripture says.

The Bible tells us without any doubt that my problem and your problem is that we still have sin remaining within us and we need a Savior from our sin. Can you give me any hope other than the Bible? Is there any other Savior than Jesus Christ? You say, "Pastor, you're preaching to the choir." I know that. But are you prepared to give this same answer to the person who will ask you who isn't singing in the choir? Are you ready? As I said last week, the day is going to come where you will be asked these kinds of questions. It's around the corner. Some of you have already received such questions. What are you going to say? This is why it's essential that I take the time to do this. Ask those who question you what explanation they have for sin or evil.

There is also no greater explanation of the hope of mankind than in the Scriptures. Think with me for a few more moments. There has been every form of human government invented and if it hasn't been it will be and it will prove to be just like the rest: a failure. Think about it. From fascism to Marxism, from oligarchies to totalitarian regimes, despots and dictators, kings and queens, and monarchs and parliamentary governments, all the way down to a democratic republic called America. Every form of government has failed to deliver what it promised, including ours. The ills of society are not solved by government. They can't be. Even if there was the hope that they could be I guarantee you failure because men will be involved in human government.

There is only one hope for the human race and it's Jesus. There is no way you're going to be able to remove wars and the rumors of wars. As long as man is in charge of this planet there will continue a dirge and destruction from his evil heart. Man has tried to remove things, I think back in the 1920's when they tried to remove alcohol from the American society. Did it work? It didn't work. It can't work. We can make laws against all the immoralities of man and it will not change the heart of man. The problem is not a legal position on same-sex marriage; the problem is the heart's position. Even if the Supreme Court had ruled the opposite it would not have removed the sin from this society. Why do we put hope in men?

The only hope of mankind is that God in His mercy will one day come and He will cleanse the earth of man's attempt at utopia and He will establish it Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. That's the answer and that's what the Bible teaches us.

What is the problem? The problem is not the reliability of Scripture, the problem is that man doesn't want to hear what the Bible says. Even Christians today seem to have a difficulty wanting to follow the truth. Does not the Bible predict such? In 2 Timothy 3:1 Paul says, "in the last days perilous times shall come." What does it mean *perilous*? It's a word that can be translated to say you don't know your right hand from your left. You don't know which is right so you'll go either way. Paul is writing to Christians about the church. Certainly we are in that hour today when men are calling evil good and good evil. The problem is not what the truth says; the problem is our wicked hearts don't want to do it. This is exactly what Peter says to us here.

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2 Peter 1:19)

See, this is the light in the dark world. The Word of God is to be shining like a bright lamp to give us light unto our path. The problem is what Jesus said,

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

There it is. There's the problem. America loves darkness more than it loves light. I can still pray, "God, bless America." I don't curse America. But America has cursed herself. We should pray, "God, bless America," but the only blessing that will change America is God opening her blind eyes to see and creating a heart that wants to believe the truth. That's the hope of this nation. By the way, it's the same hope for any of you here today. All of us. This is our only hope—that we see the light, we love the light, we're attracted to the light, and we're drawn to the light.

My dear friend, if you're suffering today, if you're going through unusual circumstances, if your heart is weary with mourning, let me give you encouragement today: the Bible has your answer. But you have to turn to it. You have to look at the light if the light is going to direct your pathway. You say, "It hurts too much. It's so difficult to have the presence of mind to read His Word, to understand His Word." Oh, my friend, look at the Lamp Lighter. Call out to Him, to the One who holds out the Lamp, Jesus Himself. Let Him hear your cry this morning. "Jesus, You know my heart has been so overwhelmed, my mind is dull to truth," oh my friend He will bless you. He will answer that prayer. Why can I be assured of that? Because of the reliability of the promise. That's what He's promised us.

I am not overwhelmed by the times in which we live. There's a part of me that's almost excited, stimulated with the prospect of what we're going to see God do even in our persecution and our sufferings. Why? Because I have a reliable testimony that says, "when the floods come they will not overtake you," and "when the enemy comes in like a flood I will raise up a standard." I have a Word that's reliable and says, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." It doesn't matter what society brings against us. It doesn't matter what the government says. It doesn't matter what Satan does, no weapon formed against you shall prosper! That's the Word of the Lord—believe it! Stand upon it. It's true.

Have we not learned through this reliable testimony that God works all things to good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose? How do you know that? Because God left you a record that's reliable. Why is it reliable and trustworthy? Because the One who gave it is. Put your hope in God. Not in men, not in political parties, not in governments, but put your hope in the One who has given us a sacred record, a revelation of His goodness and faithfulness to us. Amen.